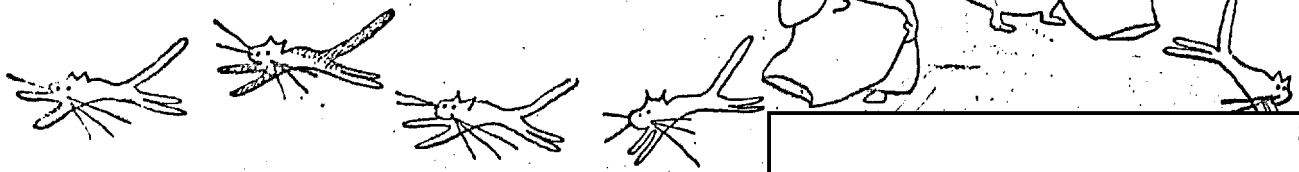


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The Kiss and Tell

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FROM 1961 to 1963, Roger Hilsman was director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and for ten months after that he was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. When Mr. Hilsman's memoir of those three years, *To Move a Nation*, came out a few months ago, it got mixed reviews. That is to say, the book reviewers liked it and Mr. Hilsman's former colleagues in government did not. Both were reacting to the same aspect of Mr. Hilsman's book: its extensive disclosure of information that the government had considered confidential.

In its way, *To Move a Nation* caps the trend to political indiscretion that has become ever more pronounced in the memoirs of the Kennedy years—a trend that has raised a number of questions we all find somewhat uncomfortable to discuss. How, for instance, are we to judge the merit of a book that is based largely on material to which we have no access? And what—to cite the point we most studiously avoid—are the proprieties and improprieties of all this secret-baring?

A COUPLE of years ago, when these books began to appear, there was some argument about them—especially about the early installments of Arthur Schlesinger's *A Thousand Days*. However, as luck would have it, we soon bogged down in a debate about secrecy, and privacy, and his-

tory, and the CIA, and the Manchester book, and whether or not the White House nanny broke the faith—and it was all very passionate but quite inconclusive. What did emerge was the fact that many people did not think of secrecy and openness as neutral conditions, which could be either helpful or harmful to our larger democratic purposes. Rather, they regarded secrecy as being in itself and at all times inimical to those purposes—a view that overlooks, among many other things, our attitude toward the ballot box and the sentiments we were expressing not so very long ago when Adlai Stevenson was publicly attacked for the private counsel he gave during the Cuban missile crisis. At that time, it was the consensus that a democracy could hardly function so long as advisers to the President faced the possibility that bits and pieces of their confidential conversations would be disclosed and used against them.

Maybe the case was overstated then; we are rarely calm on this subject. But certainly any accounting of the price we may pay for piercing too many veils must include this chance that public officials, who after all cannot respond in kind, will be unjustly treated, and that there will be a subsequent erosion of what confidence and frankness exist inside government. The principle—and the risk—apply to our foreign relations as well. Apparently many govern-

ments do not consider the substance of their private talks with us fit subject matter for the next season's best-sellers. Like Pierre Salinger in *With Kennedy*, for instance, former Ambassador to Kenya William Attwood, in a memoir called *The Reds and the Blacks*, was relatively restrained concerning people at their desks in Washington. However, Mr. Attwood freely reproduced the details of his discussions with members of Jomo Kenyatta's government, in consequence of which our present ambassador has scarcely been able to get the time of day in Nairobi for the year that he has been there, although he went so far as publicly to pledge that he would not betray the confidences of the Kenyatta government in a book or otherwise.

Just as these twin considerations of possible damage to individuals and to official relationships have been treated differently by the memoirists, so there are differences too in their approach to a final consideration, that of divulging classified material. On the whole, in the three principal memoirs the movement has been onward and upward. In *Kennedy*, Theodore C. Sorensen is more allusive than direct when he is talking about material that has not been declassified, and he tends to quote advisers without identifying them. Usually we can guess who they are, however, and if not, we can always go look them up in Mr. Schlesinger, whose own more copious.

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